

## Ethics

### Food Taken From Schools

The breakfast and lunch programs are designed and funded to serve students in the cafeteria. No food, not even leftover food, is to be purchased and taken from the premises. In addition to the food being misused, taking food from the lunchroom may create a serious public relations problem by causing people to lose faith in the integrity of the program(s). Food may only be taken from the school for school-sponsored field trips or in connection with a school sponsored gleaning program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

### Fraud Statement

"Whoever embezzles, willfully misapplies, steals, or obtains by fraud any funds, assets, or property provided under the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program whether received directly or indirectly, shall if such funds, assets, or property are of a value of \$100 or more, be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned not more than 5 years or both; or if such funds, assets, or property are of a value of less than \$100, be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than one year or both. Whoever receives, conceals, or retains to his use or gain, funds, assets, or property provided under the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, whether received directly or indirectly, knowing such funds, assets, or property have been embezzled, willfully misapplied, stolen, or obtained by fraud, shall be subject to the same penalties." This statement regarding fraud is from National School Lunch Program Regulations [7CFR245.12, Jan. 1, 1996].

### Purchasing Ethics

The competitive nature of the public purchasing arena and the expenditure of significant amounts of public funds require that ethical standards be incorporated into the foundation of all purchasing functions. Purchasing personnel and School Food Authority (SFA) staff face the difficult task of developing good vendor relations and encouraging vendor competition while avoiding even the appearance of favoritism or other ethical misconduct.

Numerous problems may be encountered including:

- Employees, in an effort to get the job done successfully and on time, are tempted to circumvent policies, procedures, and laws or to make their own liberal "legal" interpretations of existing policies. Such activity, although well-intentioned, will cause ethical problems.
- Sequential purchasing of the same items or type of items over the course of 12 months may exceed the SFA and/or State competitive quotation and procurement requirements. Although some sequential purchasing is intentional, it usually results from needs that could not be anticipated. It may also result from lack of centralization and/or centralized control of the purchasing function.
- An item (usually equipment) is purchased in component parts. Component purchasing usually is an attempt to circumvent bid laws or other requirements by buying an item through the issuance of multiple purchase orders for the component parts of the item versus a single purchase order for the entire item. Repeated purchases of additional optional equipment or parts

after an initial purchase may create the perception of component purchasing.

Ethics relating to conflicts of interest, financial interests in firms conducting business with the SFA, kickbacks and gratuities, and improper use of a position or confidential information should be clearly communicated throughout the SFA. Additionally, SFA personnel should be made aware of the penalties for violations of purchasing laws and ethics that may include criminal prosecution and loss of employment opportunities.

## General Ethical Standards

There are certain common standards of ethics that should govern the conduct of employees involved in the purchasing function, as follows:

### 1. Personal Gain

It is a breach of ethics to attempt to realize personal gain through public employment with a SFA by any conduct inconsistent with the proper discharge of the employee's duties.

### 2. Influence

It is a breach of ethics to attempt to influence any public employee of the SFA to breach the standards of ethical conduct set forth in this code.

### 3. Financial Interest/Employment

It is a breach of ethics for any employee of the SFA to participate directly or indirectly in a procurement when the employee knows that:

- The employee or any member of the employee's immediate family has a financial interest pertaining to the procurement;
- A business or organization in which the employee or any member of the employee's immediate family has a financial interest pertaining to the procurement; or

## Important Point!

"Gift to a Public Servant" is a Class A misdemeanor offense if the recipient is a government employee who exercises some influence in the purchasing process of the governmental body.

- Any other person, business, or organization with whom the employee or any member of the employee's immediate family is negotiating or has an arrangement concerning prospective employment is involved in the procurement.

If an SFA board member or other official has a financial interest in a procurement, that person shall abstain from discussion and decisions regarding the award of the procurement contract. In addition, the board member should disclose this financial interest by filing an affidavit with the SFA.

### 4. Gratuities

It is a breach of ethics to offer, give, or agree to give any employee or former employee of an SFA or for any employee or former employee of an SFA to solicit, demand, accept, or agree to accept from another person, a gratuity or an offer of employment in connection with any decision, approval, disapproval, recommendation, preparation of any part of a program requirement or purchase request, influencing the content of any specification or procurement standard, rendering of advice, investigation, auditing, or in any other advisory capacity in any proceeding or application, request for ruling, determination, claim, or controversy, or other particular matter pertaining to any program requirement or a contract or subcontract, or to any solicitation or proposal therefore pending before this government. Acceptance of gratuities may be construed as a criminal offense.

## 5. Kickbacks

It is a breach of ethics for any payment, gratuity, or offer of employment to be made by or on behalf of a subcontractor under a contract to the prime contractor or higher tier subcontractor for any contract of an SFA or any person associated therewith, as an inducement for the award of a subcontract or an order.

## 6. Contract Clause

The prohibition against gratuities and kickbacks prescribed above should be conspicuously set forth in every contract and solicitation therefore.

## 7. Confidential Information

It is a breach of ethics for any employee or former employee of an SFA knowingly to use confidential information for actual or anticipated personal gain or for the actual or anticipated gain of any person.

## Vendor Gifts and Relations

SFA officials and employees cannot accept anything of value from a vendor, such as personal gifts or gratuities, that may be construed to have been given to influence the purchasing process. Although such practices may be legitimate and generally accepted in the private sector, giving and receiving gifts in the public sector may constitute a violation of law.

It is a good practice for a SFA to consult with its attorney and/or other legal counsel at the State Ethics Commission or the Attorney General's Office to develop policies regulating the acceptance of vendor gifts. These policies should not only conform to applicable statutes but should also reflect the SFA's philosophy regarding regulation of the acceptance of the following from existing or prospective vendors:

- meals,
- trips,
- tickets for entertainment, or
- gifts of any value.

SFAs should also be aware of the disclosure requirements regarding Federal conflict of interest regulations that prohibit an employee (and members of the employee's immediate family) who is involved in administering, directing, or authorizing federally funded transactions from having a financial interest in a vendor associated with federally funded transactions.

## Incentives

Vendors often will make a special offer on a particular item. They might offer charbroiled beef patties at a much lower price than the SFA's bid price; offer an item not presently used at a special price that is below market value; or offer an incentive, such as equipment or other prizes. May an SFA take advantage of these specials? Yes, as discussed below.

### **When a vendor offers an item at a lower price than the bid price.**

Once you have bid an item and accepted the bid price, you are not free to obtain bids or to purchase from anyone other than the vendor who has received the bid unless

- (1) you have specified an amount in the bid,
- (2) you will still purchase that amount from the bidder, and
- (3) you want to purchase an amount in addition to what was bid.

Procedures for small purchases may be used in obtaining prices on the additional merchandise, unless the additional purchases will exceed \$10,000.

### **When a vendor offers an item you are not presently using at a special price below market value.**

All purchases under competitive bidding must be based on specifications that clearly describe the item to be purchased. If you have tried a new product and would like to purchase it, competitive sealed bids must be obtained if purchases will be \$10,000 or more (spot purchase procedures may

be used to purchase additional quantities of items in a competitive pricing category, if purchases will be less than \$10,000).

**When a vendor offers incentives.**

The prices paid for all purchases should be based solely on the bid offered by the responsible vendor giving the SFA the best bid prices meeting specifications. When “incentives,” such as prizes, equipment, etc., are offered and accepted,

- (1) the “incentive” must in no way affect the decision to purchase and
- (2) the “incentive” must become the property of the SFA and under no condition becomes the property of an individual.

Special offers often mean higher prices or lower quality or both. Frequently, special prices are offered on old merchandise that the vendor wants to move.

(Adapted from Southwest Area, *Louisiana School Food Service, Food Purchasing Manual*)

## Questions Answers

1. Q: May SFA employees purchase meals or leftover food to take home?

A: No. Even if the money was to be deposited in the food service account, program regulations state that any food prepared for the Child Nutrition Programs must be consumed on school premises. See Section 20 for policy concerning the release of leftover food.